

# CREATURE FEATURE

## freddy krueger

BY JAMES VAN HISE

"Freddy Krueger represents a pure evil that's directed against the pristine element of humanity, which is children. He just hates that element of youth, vigor and innocence — and enjoys destroying it!"

This is how Wes Craven describes the monster who stalked so effectively through *A Nightmare On Elm Street*. Released (appropriately enough) in 1984, the film unleashed the most original movie monster to appear since Universal introduced the definitive screen versions of Dracula and Frankenstein, as well as serving up their original contributions to the horror genre—The Wolfman and The Mummy. A lot of monsters have slithered and slimed their way across the screen since the Thirties and Forties, but not many have achieved the startling mythic proportions of that vengeful, fire-scarred spirit, Freddy Krueger. (*What about me? The boys Universally appreciate my proportions — Evila*)

How does a character of such frightening originality come to be? As writer/director Craven explains, it started with the story and then the monster grew as one idea meshed with another.

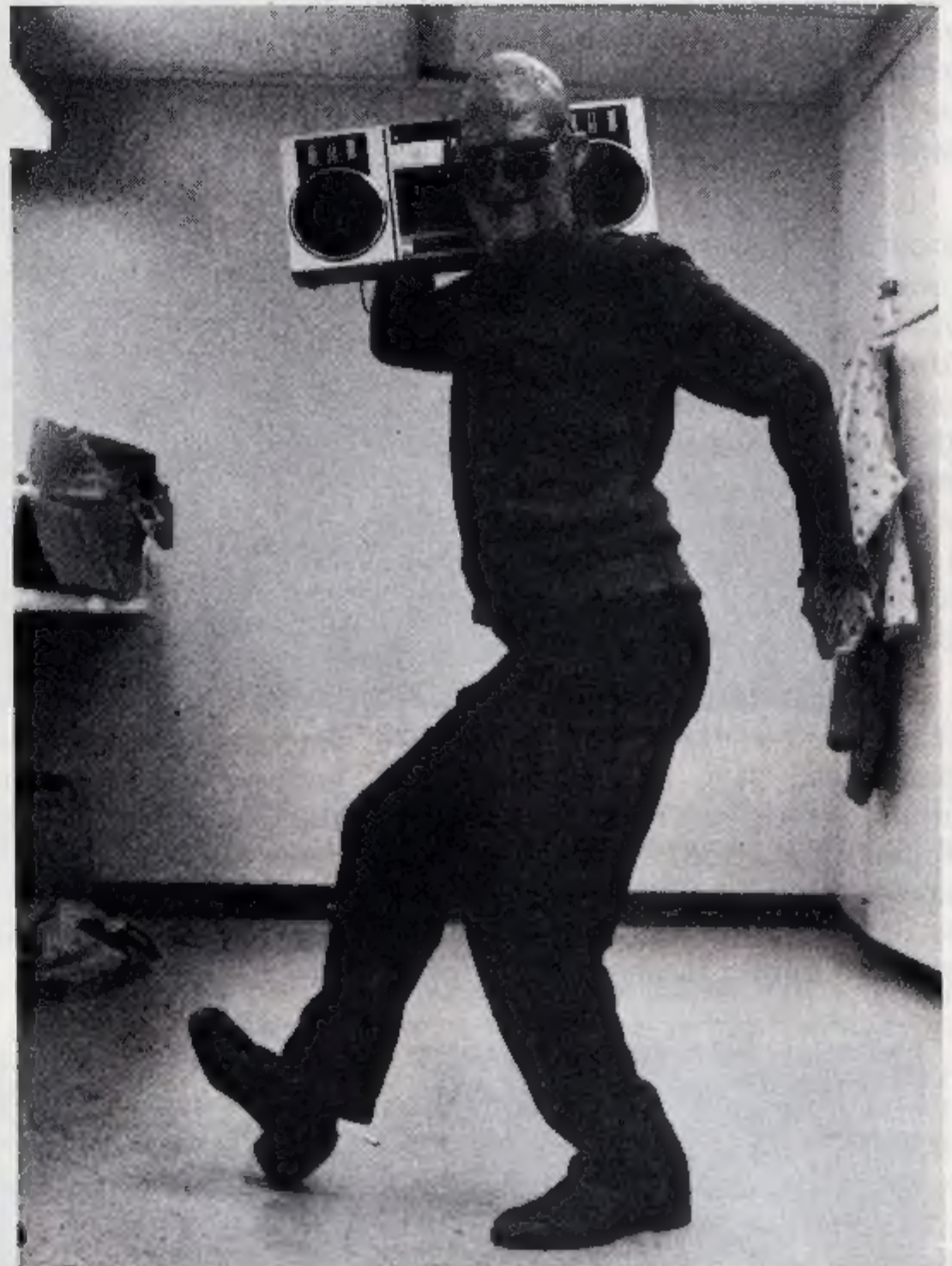
### GROWING A MONSTER

"He was always the old man with the rumpled, dirty clothes and fire-scarred face," Craven explains. "Part of it was pure analysis of the most popular horror films. They featured characters whose face you could not see clearly. In *Halloween* and then with Jason (in the *Friday The Thirteenth* series) the terrors were usually firmly ensconced so Freddy's burnt face was itself a mask.

"The other thing was the choice of weapon. I started with a standard butcher knife and then decided, 'Well, I can't do that. Everybody's done that!' For awhile he had a sickle, and then somewhere in the third or fourth draft of the script, I hit upon the glove with knives affixed to it. That image was the most powerful and terrifying."

But to bring an idea to life, one needs the right actor. Thus began the most difficult aspect of making *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, the search for the perfect Freddy Krueger! (*Looking for Mr. Fright. — Evila*)

"I looked at hundreds of guys and a lot of old men. I wanted somebody that was very agile. I learned from making films like *The Hills Have Eyes* that it wasn't the bigness of the



Freddy gets down and dirty!

villain that paid off, it was the evil he was able to transmit as an actor. I wanted somebody who was an actor rather than a stuntman, somebody who could convey a sense of evil and who was very enthusiastic about it. While there were a lot of actors who would take a role to play somebody very evil, they would do it with reservations. So I looked for somebody who was really enthusiastic about getting into an evil state. You really have to get malicious and malevolent and a lot of actors just don't want to get there, their heart isn't in it. You have to find somebody who is comfortable with that idea and isn't threatened by it. He knows it isn't them, but can go there. Robert Englund filled the bill after we found him quite late in the casting.

"His delight with it is that he had been playing nebishes and good guys and was looking forward to playing somebody older and evil." Previously Englund had been most recognized for his portrait of the shy, harmless alien Willie on the tv series *V*.

Freddy is, of course (for those of you who've forgotten or else were so frightened you tried to blot him out of your











mind), a ghost. He was a child killer who was tracked down to his lair in an old warehouse and burned alive when the place was set afire. But evil can sometimes have a life of its own. Years later the image of Freddy begins haunting the dreams, as well as the reality, of the children of the adults who slew him.

"Now that he is in that boundless realm of dreams and non-corporeal existence, he has enormous power," Craven explains. "In a sense, Freddy stands for the worst of parenthood and adulthood—the dirty old man, the nasty father and the adult who wants children to die rather than help them prosper. He's the boogey man and the worst fear of children — the adult that's out to get them. He's a very primal figure, sort of like Kronos devouring his children — that evil, twisted, perverted father figure that wants to destroy and is able to get them at their most vulnerable moment, which is when they're asleep!" (*I'll slay you in your dreams... — Evila*)

### FREDDY WITHOUT HIS FATHER

Wes Craven created Freddy Krueger. And yet he was not involved in how his brainchild was handled in Freddy's second outing, *A Nightmare On Elm Street — Part 2*. He is writing Freddy's third horrific romp though. Craven is candid regarding what befell his monster while he was outside of his control.

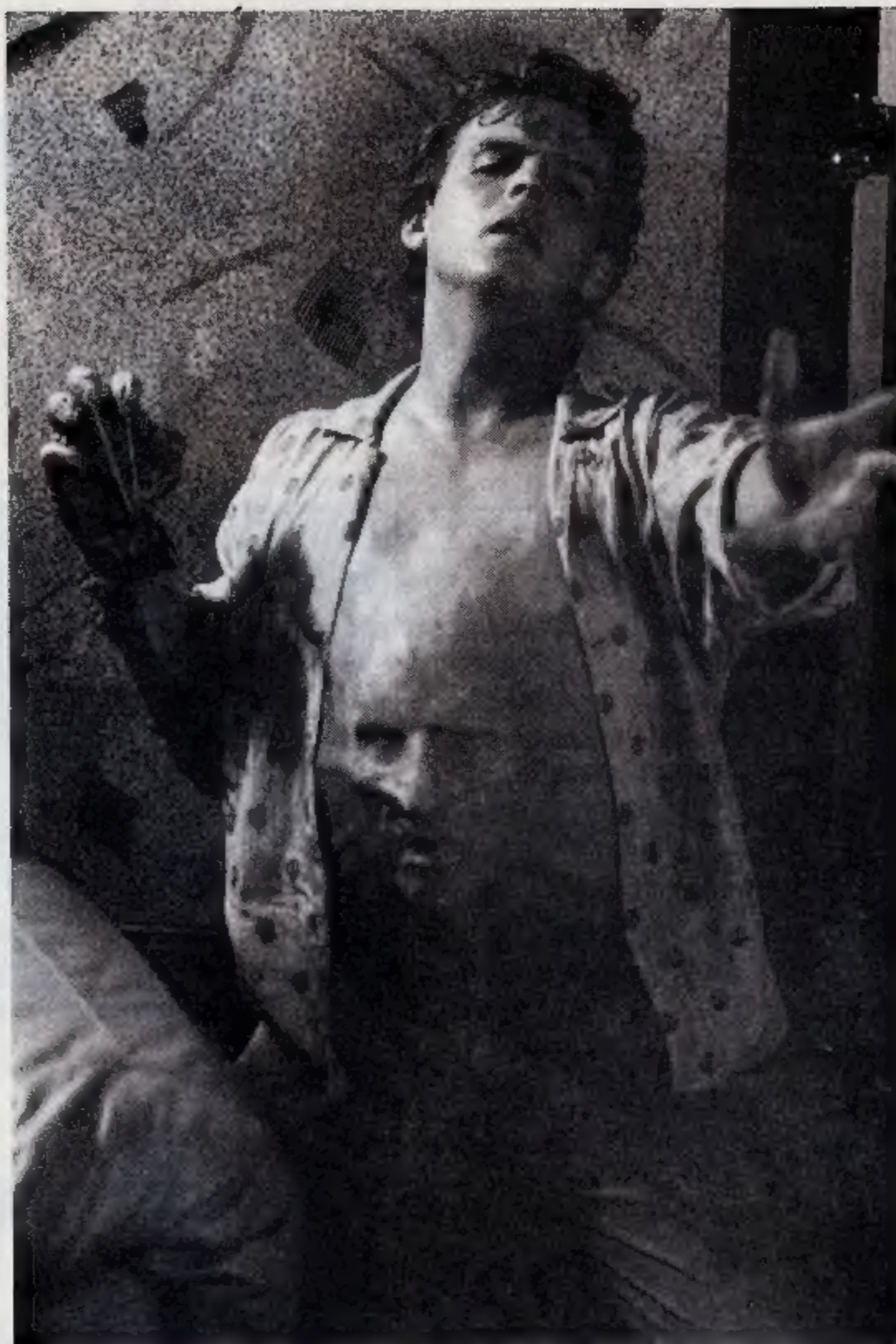
The monster maker states, "Frankly, I didn't care for it that much. It was well directed, but I didn't like the story. That was why I didn't direct it. I didn't have the time to write it, and when I asked to see the script, I made known that I thought it should be changed. They decided to go ahead and do it the way it was and I found it quite laughable.

"I didn't understand what the hell a lot of the scenes meant. They seemed to be thrown in for effect but didn't come out of the fabric of the story. The canary diving around the living room while the stove is leaking seemed laughable to me!

"Another mistake was that Freddy wasn't around much and he as somehow mixed up with the lead character. That was a terrible dramatic mistake! You can't have a clearcut confrontation with evil if they're the same person. You start out identifying with this guy as the lead and then have to make an awkward transition over to the girl as the person you identify with because she becomes the heroine who's trying to straighten everything out. You have to let the audience know who they're rooting for and not make them switch horses in mid-stream. That was one of the big flaws in the movie, plus a lot of ridiculous scenes were thrown in with no coherent reason for being there."

Craven explains that the opening sequence in *Nightmare 2* was something he refused to do at the closing of the original picture.

"It's funny, but the producer really wanted me to have Freddy at the steering wheel in the car at the end of *Nightmare 1*. I refused because the main character has beaten him. If she gets taken off in the car, at least her boyfriend is going to be at the wheel, or nobody's driving. He wanted that scene so much that he went out and did it as the first scene in the second film. That's why it was there! He loved that image of Freddy at the wheel, but I thought it was kind



Freddy takes possession of his latest victim!

of ridiculous. There's lots of scenes like that, such as the flagellation scene of the gym teacher in the shower which is bizarre and strange but has nothing to do with anything."

The difference between the first two pictures is simple. Wes Craven created the characters in the first. In the second, other hands *interpreted* characters without understanding them. (*They should have consulted Dr. Ackula, the famed monster headshrinker — Evila*).

"They didn't understand what it was about," Craven states, "but they were totally convinced that they did. When somebody thinks they're on the right track and you think they're totally off, there's nothing you can do. They were convinced that *Nightmare 2* was a better picture and they cite reviews and boxoffice to back them up.

"There were a couple interesting things in it, though," Craven admits, "like the scene where he came in on his little sister and went back to being himself, which I thought was scary and satisfying. But most of it was idiotic. I'm surprised it did as well as it did, but I suspect people were going to see a good one like the first one."

One common complaint by fans of Freddy was that their favorite monster only appeared in a few scenes. Now that he's working on *Nightmare 3*, Craven promises that will not happen again. Plenty of Freddy!

"Freddy will be back in *Nightmare 3*, full strength!" (*I can't wait to have the old boy back, he's a real cut up! — Evila*).